

**REMARKS/ARGUMENTS**

It is asserted that these amendments do not add new matter and are supported by the specification and claims as originally filed. Entry of these claims is respectfully requested.

Claims 22-42 have been rejected.

Claims 22-24 have been amended.

Claims 25-42 are kept unchanged.

Claims 22-42 are pending in the application.

Claims 22-42 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Dudgeon et al. (USPN 6,433,220) in view of Costantini et al. (USPN 6,787,669).

Claim 22 has been amended to make it clear that the esters formed during the reaction are unwanted byproducts (please see page 2, lines 11-18) and that the hydrolysis step is carried out by addition of a strong acid to the medium to be treated. Thus, the claimed process is not an esterification process of hydrocarbon products to produce ester compounds, but an oxidation process of hydrocarbons into diacids with production of esters as byproducts.

The table 5 in column 8 of US 6,433,201 teaches the hydrolysis of byproduct esters but after their separation with the esters of the reaction medium. On the contrary, in the claimed process, the hydrolysis is carried out on the reaction medium obtained directly from the oxidation step without even performing the extraction of the other products or catalysts.

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AMENDMENT

US 6,787,669 teaches in column 2, starting from line 59, a distillation step enabling the extraction of the esters present in the distillation bottoms. The extracts so obtained can be recycled in a new oxidation reaction either directly or after hydrolysis of the esters.

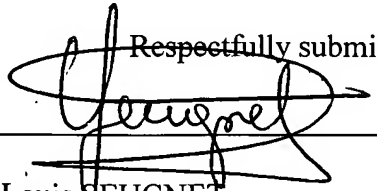
Therefore, the two cited patents only teach that esters, who are byproducts of the oxidation reaction of hydrocarbons into diacids, can be extracted from the oxidation reaction medium and, then, submitted to a hydrolysis step before a possible recycling to the oxidation step. Moreover, none of these patents describes nor suggests how to perform the hydrolysis by adding a strong acid to the reaction medium.

For these reasons, Applicant respectfully requests that the Examiner now reconsider and withdraw the rejection of claims 22-42 under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Dudgeon et al. (USPN 6,433,220) in view of Costantini et al. (USPN 6,787,669).

In view of the preceding remarks, it is asserted that the patent application is in condition for allowance. Should the Examiner have any question concerning these remarks that would further advance prosecution of the claims to allowance, the examiner is cordially invited to telephone the undersigned agent at (609) 860-4180. A notice of allowance is respectfully solicited.

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